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Top Secret

25X1

February 10, 1975

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Page Denied

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

CONTENTS

SOUTH VIETNAM: Tet expected to bring only a moderate increase in military activity. (Page 3)

SOUTH KOREA: President Pak certain to win referendum this week. (Page 6)

PAKISTAN: Assassination of key Bhutto aide may further strain relations with Afghanistan. (Page 8)

PERU: Velasco's support shaken as result of last week's violence. (Page 9)

SPAIN-MOROCCO: Madrid sends military reinforcements to Ceuta and Melilla. (Page 10)

FOR THE RECORD: (Page 11)

Page Denied

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

SOUTH VIETNAM

With the approach of the South Vietnamese Lunar New Year, Tet, on February 11, all indications point to some step-up in Communist shellings and terrorist attacks, but there is no reliable evidence that anything heavier is in store. Saigon's military forces throughout the country are on full alert, and government holiday celebrations will be limited to one day instead of the usual three. Such preparations [redacted]

25X1

[redacted] point to a moderate level of military activity in the various military regions.

Countrywide by military region, the following military activity appears likely:

--In Military Region 1, local skirmishing is expected to continue in varying degrees of intensity. Some government commanders see the current localized activity, however, as the prelude to a full-fledged main force offensive sometime this spring.

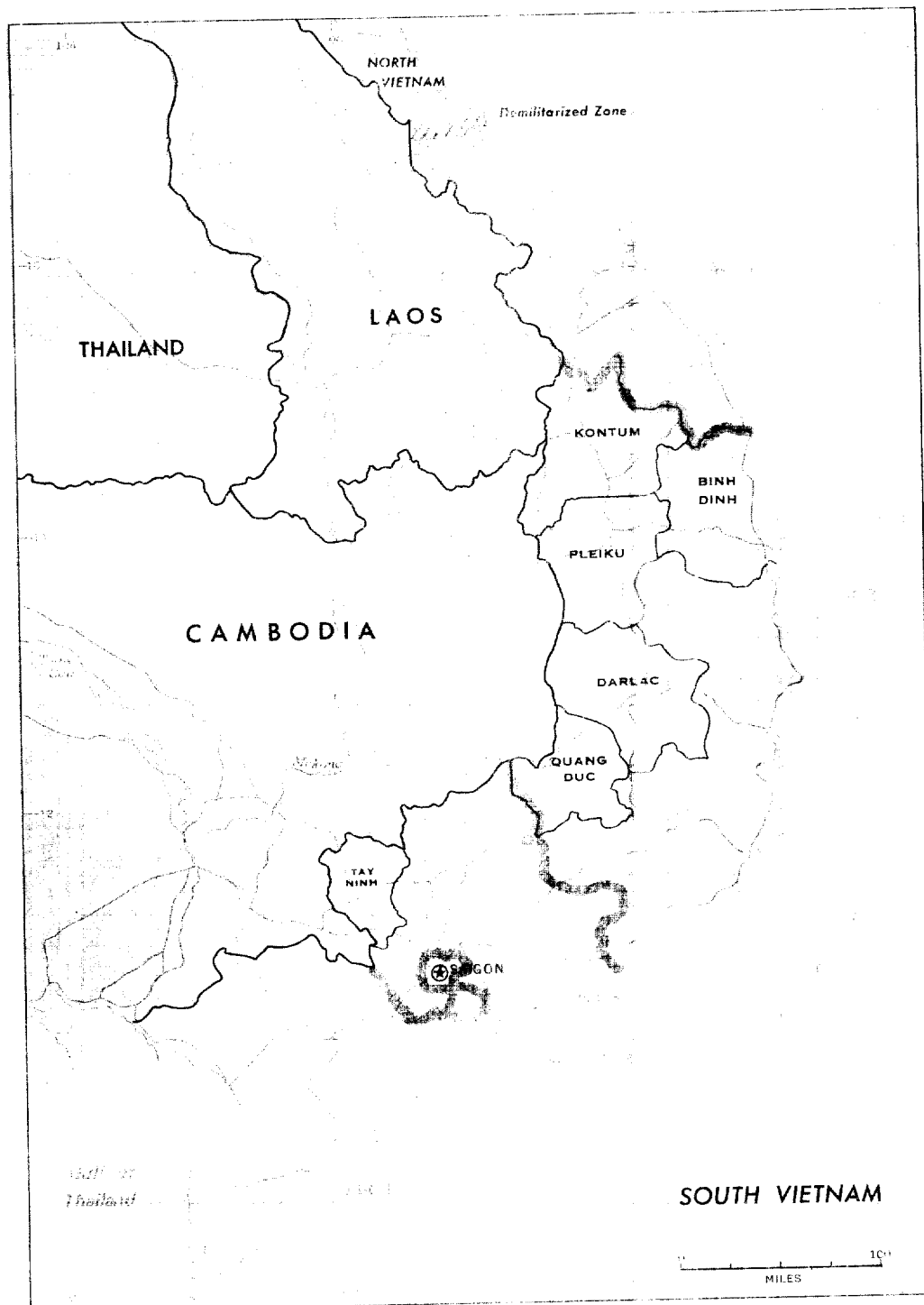
--In Military Region 2, reports from the principal trouble spots--Binh Dinh Province on the coast, and the central highland provinces of Kontum and Pleiku--indicate little action is expected. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

--In Military Region 3, stepped-up action is expected in the provinces around Saigon, especially Tay Ninh. [redacted]

25X1



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National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

25X1

--In Military Region 4, Communist forces reportedly have celebrated the holiday early and will conduct shellings and terrorist attacks against government outposts, some district and provincial towns, and highways and canals. Most government commanders feel, however, that recent heavy casualties and low morale among Viet Cong forces in the delta will limit both the intensity and effectiveness of their Tet actions.

25X1

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

SOUTH KOREA

President Pak will win the February 12 referendum, which is designed to validate his leadership under the authoritarian 1972 constitution. The evidence of the past two weeks indicates careful government preparation to ensure a solid national majority for him; no one in South Korea expects otherwise.

In this situation, the question is why Pak chose to hold the referendum in the first place. What does he hope to gain by what is generally seen by opponents and outsiders as little more than a political exercise?

Pak apparently sees the referendum as a useful tactic in his continuing effort to suppress domestic dissent. He hopes to:

--Put his opponents on the defensive--they had been planning a major antigovernment campaign this spring.

--Lay the public relations groundwork for new suppressive measures if the opposition campaign materializes.

--Demonstrate to audiences at home and abroad--particularly in the US Congress--that, however vocal, his opposition has relatively little support nationally.

--Reassert, in the broadest sense, the legitimacy of his government.

Despite the certainty of victory, Pak faces a minor dilemma in pursuing his referendum strategy: what should the margin of victory be? A 92-percent majority on the pattern of the vote on his 1972 constitution would be unbelievable--even to his supporters--and hence counter-productive in public relations terms. It would not be credible as a basis for a new crackdown by the regime. A 55- or 60-percent majority, on the other hand, would

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

undercut the government's argument that the dissent of the past two years has been the work of malcontents and Communist dupes. Under the circumstances, it might be seen as a moral victory for the opposition.

A basic defect of Pak's referendum process, of course, is that it can resolve none of his political headaches. But Pak is undoubtedly aware of this and may be shooting for nothing more than a breathing space-- a few months of public attention to what he plans to do with his new mandate, and diminished interest in the complaints of his opponents.

There are reports, for example, that Pak will follow up the referendum with major changes in the structure of the government party as well as a cabinet reshuffle-- including perhaps the replacement of Prime Minister Kim Chong-pil. There are also rumors of conciliatory gestures to the opposition. In the end, therefore, what appears to be a meaningless political exercise might well help achieve at least some of the purposes for which it has been designed.

25X1

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

PAKISTAN

The assassination on Saturday of a high Pakistani official in the politically sensitive North West Frontier Province has forced Prime Minister Bhutto to cancel a stop in Romania following a visit to the US.

The incident, in which Home Minister Sherpao was killed, poses no direct threat to Bhutto's personal position, but Pakistan's already strained relations with Afghanistan may become further embittered. In recent months, Pakistani authorities have accused the opposition National Awami Party and neighboring Afghanistan of complicity in a number of bombings in Pakistan, including an attempt late last year on Sherpao's life. Both the NAP and the Afghans denied the charges.

No information is available yet on who was responsible for the bomb that killed Sherpao. The government has arrested at least 60 opposition leaders, including National Awami Party (NAP) chief Wali Khan and all of his top aides. Bhutto's decision to crack down hard on the NAP--the strongest party in the province--will have a direct impact on relations with Afghanistan. Kabul has long supported the NAP because of the ethnic ties between Afghans and most of the people in the Pakistani province. The Prime Minister apparently concluded that the assassination is a direct challenge that demanded an immediate show of strength against his opponents. Bhutto periodically has arrested NAP workers in the past, but he has stopped short of trying completely to suppress the party.

Bhutto can also be expected to act promptly to ensure his continuing control over the shaky coalition that controls the provincial government. While there is no immediate danger that the government led by Bhutto's party will collapse, the Prime Minister will be hard pressed to find another strong and reliable lieutenant to replace Sherpao.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

PERU

The repercussions of last week's violence in Lima that left dozens dead and extensive property damage are beginning to be felt in the top echelons of President Velasco's military government. There are no signs that Velasco's position has been critically weakened, but there are indications that his support has been shaken.

25X1

Although the military has been unable during the past six years to build a popular base of support, it has taken pride in its ability to run the country effectively and without bloodshed. In the wake of last week's events, however, what little support the military has had will be jeopardized. Both moderate and radical officers are sensitive to this state of affairs. If it appears Velasco's continuation in power will serve only to further alienate civilian elements, a move to replace him with another general is likely to pick up steam.

The chances for a successful move along these lines are increased as a result of recent events. Much depends on what the newly installed Prime Minister, General Morales Bermudez, decides to do; his intentions remain unclear.

25X1

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin February 10, 1975

SPAIN-MOROCCO

Spain's move over the weekend in sending naval and marine reinforcements to its enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Morocco's Mediterranean coast was evidently designed to make clear Madrid's rejection of Moroccan claims to the territories.

Late last month, Rabat made a formal demarche to the UN Committee on Decolonization requesting an examination of the status of the Spanish enclaves. Moroccan Foreign Minister Laraki followed this with a call for the return of the two enclaves, as well as Spanish Sahara. The Moroccan move is seen as an effort by King Hassan to enhance his domestic prestige, now that interest in the Spanish Sahara question is diminishing, following referral of that issue to the International Court of Justice.

The Moroccan action on the enclaves provoked surprise, alarm, and near-unanimous indignation in Spain. Spanish military contacts of the US defense attache in Madrid immediately stressed that, although Madrid intends to withdraw from the Sahara, it will never withdraw from the enclaves.

Spanish officials are aware of their vulnerability on the Ceuta and Melilla issue in the UN because of the strong influence exerted in that forum by the third world nations, which support decolonization. The US embassy in Madrid believes that if Spain loses in the UN on this issue, it will ignore any subsequent resolution calling for withdrawal from the enclaves.

The enclaves issue is also likely to affect Madrid's relations with the US. Spain may raise this issue with the US in the negotiations that resume today in Madrid over renewal of US base rights in Spain. Spanish officials reacted negatively to news reports of US arms sales to Morocco during the Spanish-Moroccan dispute over the Sahara, and this bitterness may intensify.

National Intelligence Bulletin

February 10, 1975

FOR THE RECORD

USSR: The two Soviet cosmonauts in the Soyuz 17 space ferry were brought back to earth successfully yesterday after completing 30 days in space, 28 of them in an orbiting space station. This is the third successful docking of a Soyuz spacecraft and a Salyut space station. According to the Tass announcement, the space ferry landed in a designated area in Kazakhstan.

25X1

Cyprus: Cyprus remained quiet over the weekend, despite several indications on Friday that a Turkish military operation might be imminent. The US defense attaché reports that the chances of an early Turkish military initiative have dimmed.

25X1

25X1

Venezuela: President Perez is planning to meet with the five Central American presidents following his trip to Mexico late next month. Neither the agenda nor the exact timing has been worked out, but a Costa Rican Foreign Ministry announcement last week said that Perez will stay for three days to meet with the region's leaders. This will be the second meeting in little more than three months, demonstrating the Central Americans' interest in clarifying the terms of recent Venezuelan aid and Perez' interest in obtaining their support on a number of issues that will come before a Latin American summit meeting in March and an OAS meeting in April.

25X1

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National Intelligence Bulletin February 10, 1975

Argentina: President Peron has given the go-ahead to the army to move forcefully against left-wing guerrillas that have become increasingly active in recent weeks, according to press reports. The first target area will be the northwest province of Tucuman, where the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) is active. The army heretofore has resisted efforts to have it assume primary responsibility for combating guerrillas. Police ineffectiveness in this task and numerous assassinations of army officers by guerrillas, however, apparently have convinced the army that it must resume the role. It is uncertain whether the army will be able to achieve quick success in its operations against the ERP; in the past this group has successfully eluded army troops trying to smash its organization.

25X1

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25X1

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25X1